

Agenda Item 8.2

Funding of Projects and Activities

Project Proposals Received in the 2021
Call

Document 8.2

**Project Proposals Received in the 2021
Call**

Action Requested

- Review the document
- Take note of the results of the rating undertaken in advance of the meeting
- Provide advice for overall priority rating of internal and external projects and activities (Agenda Item 8.3)

Submitted by

Secretariat



PROJECT PROPOSALS RECEIVED IN THE 2021 CALL

1. After the 2017-2020 budget period, some savings were identified, most of which were used to replenish the ASCOBANS ‘Conservation Projects’ budget line as per Resolution 9.6. Following consultation with the Advisory Committee Chair and Vice-chair, the Secretariat circulated a call for proposals for project funding through ASCOBANS on 17 March 2021, and posted a news item to the ASCOBANS website to advertise this funding opportunity. Thirteen applications were received by the deadline of 30 April 2021. A tabular overview of the proposals, in order of submission, can be found below in Table 1. Referring to commercial confidentiality, an issue raised at AC25, the Secretariat decided not to post the full project proposals to this document.
2. The Secretariat compiled all proposals and made them available to Parties and Approved Observer Organisations (who registered to AC26 on time) via Google Docs, for their consideration and rating. For the rating, an online survey was created. The guidelines specify that only projects with a direct benefit for the conservation objectives of the Agreement can be supported, and that projects covering more than one ASCOBANS Party should be favoured. Ratings were received from nine Parties and one Approved Observer Organisation. Those ratings have been reflected in Table 2, showing the ranking of the proposals based on the submitted ratings.
3. Ratings available were: 0 = Not a priority, 1 = Medium priority, 2 = High priority, 3 = Very high priority. If a rating “medium/high” or “1-2” was given, that resulted in 1.5 points. If a rating “low priority” was given, this was considered 0 points. If a respondent indicated a conflict of interest with a particular proposal, their rating was not taken into consideration. Table 2 shows the mean of the points and the total amount of points a proposal received.

Table 1. Overview of the submitted project proposals.

No.	Title	Applicant	Funding requested (EUR)	Planned start
1	Code of conduct for Harbour Porpoise tourist operators	Marc Christian Allentoft-Larsen (in cooperation with Jonas Teilmann) / Marine Mammal Research, Department of Bioscience, Aarhus University, Denmark	19,885	not specified
2	Prediction of the cochlear frequency maps of harbour porpoise (<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>)	Dr. Maria Morell and Prof. Prof. h. c. Dr. Ursula Siebert / Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research (ITAW), University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Germany	20,000	not specified
3	Expanding porpoise rescue results and conservation worldwide	Annemarie van den Berg / SOS Dolfijn Foundation, The Netherlands	17,500	Jan 2022
4	Setting up teleneuroscopy	W. Dabin, F. Caurant / Observatory Pelagis, La Rochelle University/CNRS-France & T. Jauniaux / University of Liège, Belgium	16,900	1 Sept 2021

No.	Title	Applicant	Funding requested (EUR)	Planned start
5	Seasonal or Chronic? Exposure of North Sea and northeast Atlantic small cetaceans to neurotoxins produced by harmful algal blooms	Dr Joanna Kershaw / University of Plymouth, School of Biological and Marine Sciences, Faculty of Science and Engineering, United Kingdom	10,950 ¹	Jan-Feb 2022
6	Beaked whales in the Northeast Atlantic Ocean: Developing a framework to identify origins of oceanic mortality through integration of diverse data sources	Dr Steven Benjamins / Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS), Scotland, United Kingdom	20,000	1 Jan 2022
7	Development of digital factsheet catalogue for suitable tools for bycatch monitoring and mitigation from fisheries perspective for small cetaceans of the ASCOBANS area	Marije L. Siemensma / Marine Science & Communication, Netherlands & Lotte Kindt-Larsen / DTU Aqua, Denmark	19,920	Oct 2021 preferred (otherwise Nov)
8	Using fishers' knowledge to understand the use of alternative gears to static gillnets in the ASCOBANS Region	Dr Fiona L. Read and Sarah J. Dolman / Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), United Kingdom	20,000	not specified
9	Cost-effective Passive Acoustic Monitoring of beaked whales in the Malin Shelf region	Dr Suzanne Beck / Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Branch, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom	20,000	1 Oct 2021
10	Prevalence and aetiology of encephalitis in harbour porpoises	Prof. dr. Koen Chiers / Laboratory of Veterinary Pathology, Department of Pathology, Bacteriology and Avian Diseases, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Ghent University, Belgium	20,000	not specified
11	MALAMBO - Monitoring Acoustic Levels of Anthropogenic Masking of BiosOnar	Dr Mel Cosentino / Hvalsafari AS, Andenes, Norway	20,000	Fall of 2021
12	Status of the Iberian harbour porpoise	Dr Fiona L. Read / Life History Studies, United Kingdom	10,900	not specified
13	Assessing survival, total and cause-specific mortality and demographic parameters in the North Sea and Celtic & Irish Seas harbour porpoise Assessment Units.	Dr Sinéad Murphy / Marine and Freshwater Research Centre, Department of Natural Sciences, School of Science and Computing, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Ireland	19,922.50	1 Jan 2022

¹ Estimation - budget stated in GBP (9,418.68).

Table 2. Ranking of the project proposals, based on responses to the online survey.

Ranking	Title	Mean	Points	Reasoning given via the online survey
1	Proposal #8: Using fishers' knowledge to understand the use of alternative gears to static gillnets in the ASCOBANS Region	2.50	22.5	<i>Indeed fishing/bycatch is the main threat, and a key issue is the attitude of fishermen. Highly relevant project, since bycatch at present pose the largest threat to marine mammals. The development and the implementation of alternative gear to reduce or prevent bycatch is highly relevant. This project acknowledges that such work can only be done if it involves the primary stakeholders, the gillnet fishermen, and to take their experiences into account. This project is proposing to cover several countries. To obtain useful responses to interviews it might be good to consider the involvement of local partners that already have close working relationships with the fishing community. Otherwise, it would have the risk of low response rates. The use of alternative gear is also relevant in relation to fishing efforts within offshore wind farms. The project is planned to be implemented mostly through surveys. Therefore, potentially the scientific, practical contribution of the project will be lower. Interesting link with CetAMBICion. This project provides the essential next step, building on previous contracts funded by ASCOBANS. The work is also spread across 2 ASCOBANS parties and 1 range state (member of ACCOBAMS). Highest priority of all proposals submitted.</i>
2	Proposal #12: Status of the Iberian harbour porpoise	2.15	21.5	<i>This issue should be addressed to ACCOBAMS given that Spain is not an ASCOBANS party! This project covers an urgent conservation issue with some practical outcomes, however there is existing work going on to understand the status of Iberian harbour porpoise that this is potentially duplicating. The Iberian harbour porpoise is a small population and as such already vulnerable. To adequately assess the status of this population basic information on their population structure is needed, as well as an evaluation of the current threat situation. Without this it is highly challenging to propose conservation measurements and make science-based advice in other international fora (e.g. IWC). This project is highly relevant for a population that is possibly at a high risk. Planned research samples may not fully achieve the desired results. Link with CetAMBICion too. Critically endangered subpopulation within the ASCOBANS area and work would feed into work to develop a conservation plan. However, will this work link to ACCOBAMS?</i>
3	Proposal #2: Prediction of the cochlear frequency maps of harbour porpoise (<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>)	1.85	18.5	<i>Pure science? Not clear, how results of this project are useful for conservation issues. This project is well-thought through, uses innovative but validated methods and will potentially result in very high-impact outputs. It adds value across the ASCOBANS area and supports other work, e.g. noise registry, SACs. The project is based on already collected samples so it can likely provide answers in a short time frame. The understanding of how noise affects the hearing and how this is linked to the actual hearing capability is vital to better mitigate noise at sea. Following the implementation of the project, it is planned to accurately study the physiological parameters of animal hearing as well as possible pathological hearing changes in harbour porpoises caused by environmental factors / human activities. The obtained data and results can be applied to the conservation of other whales. The study itself is fully in line with the objectives of ASCOBANS. Whilst interesting and potentially very useful in the longer term, the work is however not essential for Parties to meet their commitments to ASCOBANS.</i>

Ranking	Title	Mean	Points	Reasoning given via the online survey
4	Proposal #13: Assessing survival, total and cause-specific mortality and demographic parameters in the North Sea and Celtic & Irish Seas harbour porpoise Assessment Units	1.70	17	<i>This would be useful but is not as important or impactful compared to the outputs of other projects. Life tables are relevant for a better understanding of porpoise populations in general. Changes over time are a tool to interpret large-scale changes. This type of work should also be part of every membership countries work, e.g. linked to local stranding and necropsy works. This work would benefit from including larger data sets from a larger area to allow a more complete interpretation of the results. Useful approach making more of the strandings data. Would this project help better identify management units for porpoises in the Celtic Sea area? (i.e. provide further evidence to support the delineation proposed by NAMMCO workshop in 2018).</i>
5	Proposal #11: MALAMBO - Monitoring Acoustic Levels of Anthropogenic Masking of BiosOnar	1.61	14.5	<i>This project would be beneficial to multiple Parties but is potentially not quite as impactful as some other projects. The use of PAM, in particular static, has become a standard method of porpoise monitoring. As such it is important to ensure the results are comparable between studies and any biases are considered. This includes possible changes in click records due to background noise, e.g. through shipping. This project meets the ASCOBANS policy criteria. The acoustic devices currently used to study the sounds of harbour porpoises are not completely accurate. Therefore, project seems to be an ongoing work to enable more accurate monitoring of harbour porpoises. Potentially very useful project to aid management decisions, but focused on shipping rather than pile driving - offshore wind set to see massive development over next decade in ASCOBANS area.</i>
6	Proposal #9: Cost-effective Passive Acoustic Monitoring of beaked whales in the Malin Shelf region	1.55	15.5	<i>This is a comprehensive project that will address current data gaps and follows on directly from AC26 recommendations. It is value for money because it is a part contribution to a bigger project. Our understanding of beaked whale ecology in the regions is still fairly poor, in particular in relation to potential human interactions (e.g. seismic, military) it is very relevant to obtain baseline data on beaked whale habitat use. In the past ASCOBANS has primarily focussed on the original agreement area which comprises primarily shelf waters. It would be good if the project could combine beaked whale monitoring with other small cetacean species to make optimal use of the data collection. Some project activities would be ongoing. Most of the funds are planned for the project providers themselves. The project fully complies with the provisions of ASCOBANS. This project builds on work being funded by Interreg. Beaked whales have not previously been focused on at ASCOBANS due to their distribution.</i>
6	Proposal #6: Beaked whales in the Northeast Atlantic Ocean: Developing a framework to identify origins of oceanic mortality through integration of diverse data sources	1.55	15.5	<i>This project would be useful but would potentially have less impact than other proposals due to the rarity of beaked whale mass stranding events. When mass strandings occur, in particular of deep diving species, there often is a suspected cause linked to anthropogenic sound. Currently the determination of the origin of e.g. impulsive sound and the correlation with strandings is done in a non-structured way. A common framework for these events would help to identify the issue in a more systematic and possibly faster way, which can then lead to better mitigation. Drifting modelling can be a critical part of identifying where particular events might have occurred. Wider application than just beaked whales. This project would be aided through development of links with French experts.</i>
7	Proposal #5: Seasonal or Chronic? Exposure of North	1.40	14	<i>With climate change the priority of this project might grow in the future. This project is well-thought through and value for money (as it is only asking for £9418). It has the potential to produce insights</i>

Ranking	Title	Mean	Points	Reasoning given via the online survey
	Sea and northeast Atlantic small cetaceans to neurotoxins produced by harmful algal blooms			<i>into a relatively unknown issue, with potential for high-impact outcomes. The monitoring of the impact of HAB on porpoise is highly relevant. Causes of death of stranded animals help us to improve management and conservation strategies. It is highly relevant to monitor HAB impacts as there is a chance that their occurrence will change with shifts in climate. It would be important that this type of monitoring is included in the agreed protocol to ensure that it is conducted in a similar way throughout the agreement area and beyond. Really interesting project, with clear potential links to climate change in future. The work is however not essential for Parties to meet their commitments to ASCOBANS resolutions.</i>
8	Proposal #4: Setting up telenecropsy	1.17	10.5	<i>The concept is interesting and could result in more cost-effective technology being adopted, however the money would be mainly going towards buying technology for one Party so unconvinced whether the value would really extend beyond that. Using new tools to facilitate high quality necropsies is a promising way forward. This method could also be applied to other locations that have less possibilities for pathological expertise. It would be good if such efforts would also increase the comparability of results. The application of this on a larger scale would still require long term funding which often is a limiting factor for pathological sampling. The project is focused on the practical application of knowledge and would enable the easier, faster, and cheaper exchange of information or organization of distance learning, lectures. Very few vets are actually trained to undertake PMEs. Potentially valuable outputs for training vets and non-vets to improve the outputs from stranding events. Should be transferable across Parties. Links with UK would improve project - ZSL have performed several telenecropsies.</i>
9	Proposal #10: Prevalence and aetiology of encephalitis in harbour porpoises	1.15	11.5	<i>so far the rate of encephalitis appears to be low. Compared to other proposals, this proposal is not as well-developed, does not address the most urgent conservation issues, and is not as relevant to ASCOBANS' work plan. A better understanding of causes of death of porpoises and the pathways of infections is relevant. It is work that could feed into the overall framework of the necropsy protocol. The immediate impact on conservation of porpoise is less than other projects. Infectious viral diseases have a significant impact on the harbour porpoises. This project can help to more accurately diagnose the spread of viruses. Whilst interesting and potentially very useful in the longer term, the work is however not essential for Parties to meet their commitments to ASCOBANS.</i>
10	Proposal #7: Development of digital factsheet catalogue for suitable tools for bycatch monitoring and mitigation from fisheries perspective for small cetaceans of the ASCOBANS area	1.06	9.5	<i>A Life project concerning bycatch is under preparation and might include such issues? There is a lot of work existing about bycatch monitoring and mitigation tools so there is less need for another project looking into this. Bycatch remains one of the most relevant issues for small cetaceans. Europe has worked on common bycatch mitigation for the last decade. The actual implementation of monitoring methods and mitigation method has not been streamlined and well documented. Where mitigation measures are used, such as pingers, monitoring is not mandatory. A common framework and approach for all EU countries (and others) that would lead to a more coordinated approach to tackle this problem would be extremely useful. This project proposes to involve stakeholders which is something that has maybe been lacking in the past. This work appears to repeat the recent contracts funded by ASCOBANS.</i>

Ranking	Title	Mean	Points	Reasoning given via the online survey
11	Proposal #1: Code of conduct for Harbour Porpoise tourist operators	0.89	8	<p>Some code of conducts (e.g. IWC, WCC/BFN) already exist. This project only covers one Party and would not be as high-impact as other proposals. It seemed like a lot of money for a relatively simple project. The proposal is positive regarding the planned involvement of local stakeholders, outreach, development of monitoring methods. However, the issue of porpoise watching is a very local one. While it is surely of relevance for the area, there are other larger issues for this species that would have a higher priority. Cetacean watching as a tourism activity is growing and needs to be regulated, but other projects may have greater added value. There are a number of codes of conduct for cetacean watching developed at the local level but these are usually dolphin focused. A useful addition that is transferable across ASCOBANS parties.</p>
12	Proposal #3: Expanding porpoise rescue results and conservation worldwide	0.75	7.5	<p>We anticipate that such guidelines already exist (e.g. IWC). The proposal lacks specificity. The project is not delivering a lot of value for money and would not add value to Parties with already developed volunteer networks. I believe that the money is better spent at population level instead of individual level. The rehabilitation of porpoises provides opportunities for research and public outreach. These are important longer term aims, but for concrete conservation efforts on a population level are less of a priority. The scientific and practical work of this organization in rescuing harbour porpoises and other marine animals is significant. Systematic knowledge and information could make a significant contribution to rescuing animals in other countries as well. If the project is implemented, the organization plans to use a significant part of its funds. Although valuable work has been undertaken, not all countries have the appropriate facilities in which to rehabilitate cetaceans. Will this potentially encourage animals to be kept in captivity rather than being refloated?</p>